

Overview: Distance Education and Workforce Development Reports

NC-SARA contracted with the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) to create a new Distance Education and Workforce Development Report for each SARA member state. The goal for these reports is to better help states identify how distance education can be used to meet workforce needs, as well as to identify gaps in state offerings.

These reports incorporate [NC-SARA data](#) on exclusively distance education enrollment and out-of-state learning placement activity, data from IPEDS on distance education programs offered, state educational attainment measures, and workforce development data provided by Lightcast (formerly Emsi Burning Glass). For questions about this report please contact NC-SARA at data@nc-sara.org.

Please note that states may report figures other than those included in this report due to differing methodologies; please refer to the higher education system or state higher education agency for more information.

Definition of Terms:

Distance Education: Education that uses one or more types of technology to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor and to support regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor synchronously or asynchronously.

Distance Education Program: A program for which all the required coursework for program completion can be completed entirely via distance education courses.

Exclusively Distance Education Enrollment (EDEE): Students who are solely taking coursework via distance education.

Out-of-State Learning Placement (OOSLP): Supervised field experiences such as, but not limited to, clinical rotations, internships, or student teaching, offered by SARA-participating institutions in locations outside their home state.

About NC-SARA

The National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA) is a nonprofit organization that helps expand students' access to educational opportunities and ensure more efficient, consistent, and effective regulation of distance learning programs.

Today, more than 2,400 institutions participate SARA across 49 member states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands all voluntarily participate in SARA.

About NCHEMS

The National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) is a private nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization whose mission is to improve strategic decision making in postsecondary education for states and institutions in the United States and abroad. Its work has touched on topics across a wide spectrum of public policy: strategic planning to finance and resource allocation to the development of new educational delivery models. Throughout its more than 50 years, NCHEMS has been a resource for turning data into usable knowledge for leaders and policymakers at all levels.

United States

Distance Education and Workforce Development

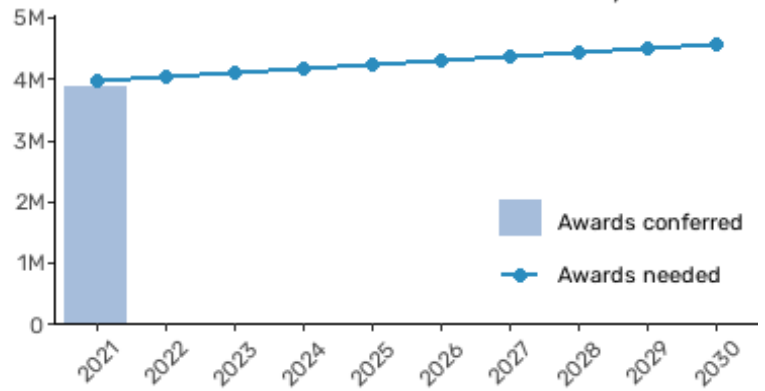
Educational Attainment and the Workforce

The Lumina Foundation has set a goal for 60 percent of the U.S. population aged 25 to 64 to possess at least a postsecondary degree or certificate of value or industry recognized certification. In order to reach that goal by **2030**, awards from postsecondary institutions will need to increase by 1.6% annually.

The industries projected to be the country's largest overall in 2030 are Health Care and Social Assistance, Government, and Retail Trade, and the ones projected to grow by the largest percentage are Transportation and Warehousing, Accommodation and Food Services, and Finance and Insurance.

This document summarizes how distance education may contribute to meeting workforce needs across the nation.

Award Production Needed to Meet United States' Attainment Goal by 2030

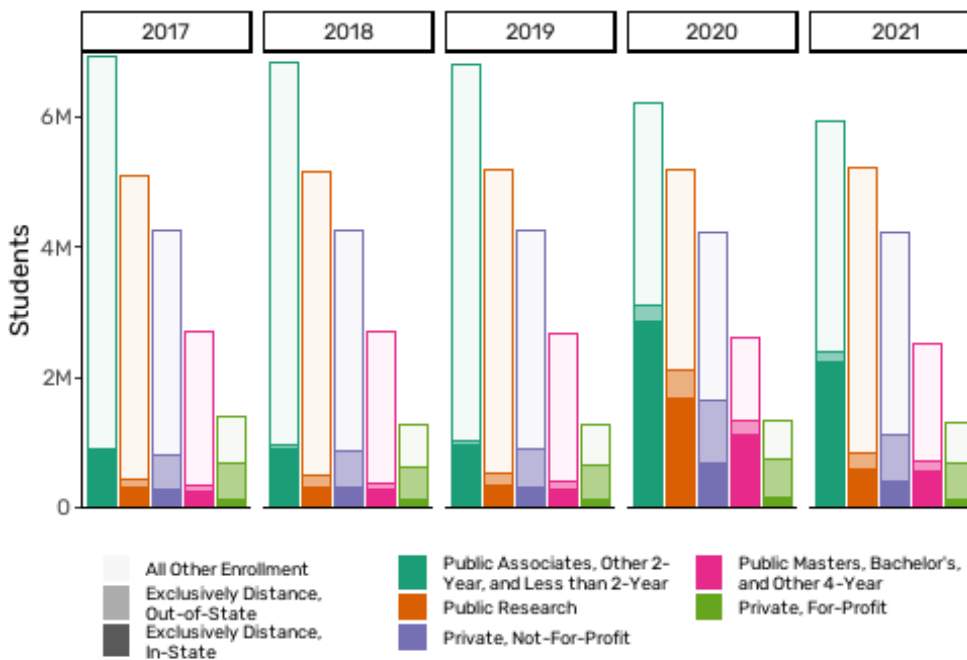


Sources: IPEDS, U.S. Census Bureau, Lumina Foundation, Georgetown Center for Education and the Workforce

College Enrollment and Distance Education

How much exclusively distance education enrollment is taking place at U.S. colleges and universities?

United States Enrollment by Fall Term
Exclusively Distance Education Enrollment vs. Total Enrollment



College and university enrollment across the United States has declined; there were 1,096,888 fewer students in Fall 2021 compared to Fall 2017. The number of students attending exclusively via distance education, however, grew from 3.14 million (15% of enrollment) in Fall 2017 to 3.48 million (17% of enrollment) in Fall 2019. The pandemic accelerated this trend, and Fall 2021 exclusively distance education enrollment was 5.77 million (30% of enrollment). Of those attending exclusively via distance education in Fall 2021, 67% were attending institutions in their home state. This represents an increase from 2019, when the percentage was 57%. In Fall 2021, the sector with the highest percentage of exclusively distance education students was Private, For-Profit, while Public Research was lowest.

Source: IPEDS

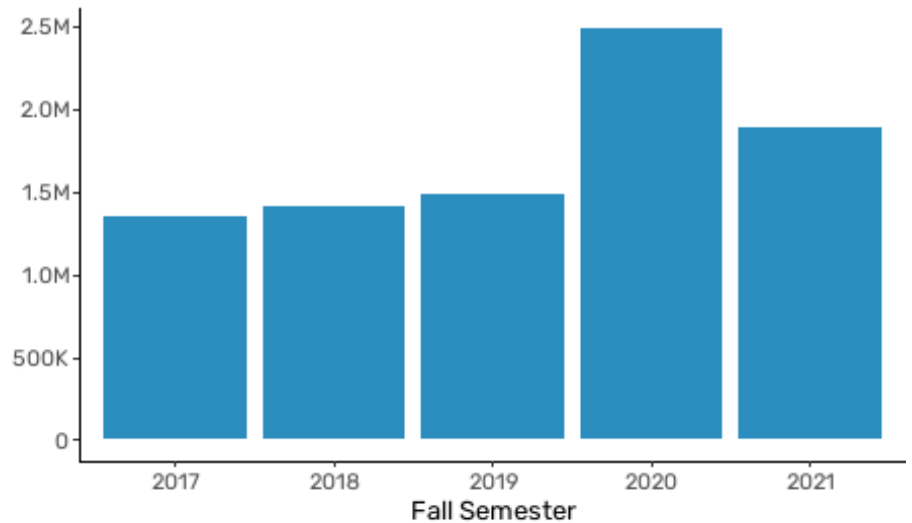
When reading the chart above, note that the darker bands represent exclusively distance education enrollments.

How many students are studying via distance education at out-of-state institutions?

Though most students study in their home state, the number studying at out-of-state institutions exclusively via distance education has increased over time.

In Fall 2017, 1.35 million U.S. students were attending out-of-state institutions exclusively via distance education. In 2021, that number was 1.89 million, an increase of 40% over four years.

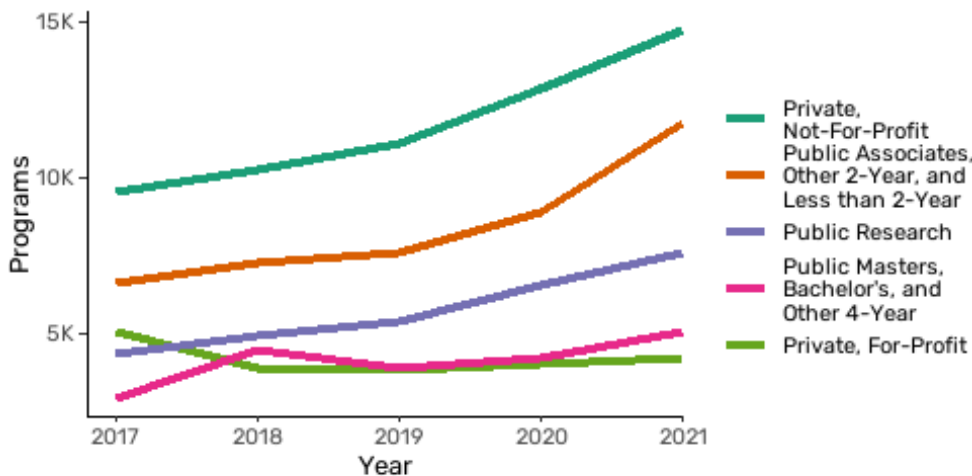
Exclusively Distance Education Enrollment
Students at Out-of-State Institutions



Source: IPEDS

What are the distance education offerings from higher education institutions?

Distance Education Programs
Over Time For All Program Levels, By Sector



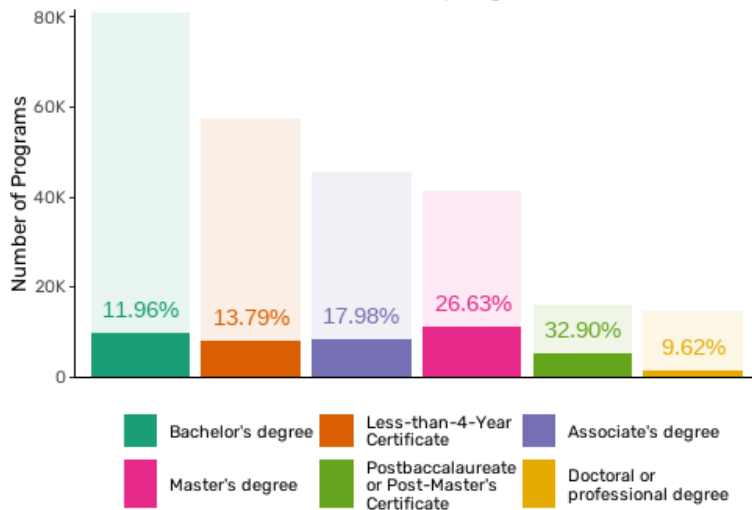
Source: IPEDS

Just as the number of distance education students has grown, the number of distance education programs has also grown, allowing students a wider variety of distance education options. A distance education program is defined as a program for which all the required coursework for program completion can be completed entirely via distance education courses.

In 2017, colleges and universities across the United States offered 28,575 distance education programs. By 2021, that number had grown to 43,404, an increase of 52%. In 2021, the sector with the largest number of distance education programs was Private, Not-For-Profit, which offered 18% of its programs (14,720 programs) via distance education. Across all sectors, 43% of institutions offered at least one program that could be completed entirely via distance education.

In 2021, U.S. institutions in offered distance education programs in 38 disciplines. These accounted for 17% of all programs offered across the country. The largest number of distance education programs were available at the Master's degree level; there were 10,970 such programs across 1,429 institutions. The programs most commonly offered via distance education were in Business, Management, Marketing, and Related Support Services.

Programs Available via Distance Education, 2021
United States Institutions, by Program Level



Source: IPEDS

Five most common distance education programs in the United States, 2021

Program Level	Discipline	Distance Education Programs
Master's degree	Education	2,782
Less-than-4-Year Certificate	Business, Management, Marketing, and Related Support Services	2,518
Bachelor's degree	Business, Management, Marketing, and Related Support Services	2,400
Master's degree	Business, Management, Marketing, and Related Support Services	2,140
Associate's degree	Business, Management, Marketing, and Related Support Services	2,050

Source: IPEDS

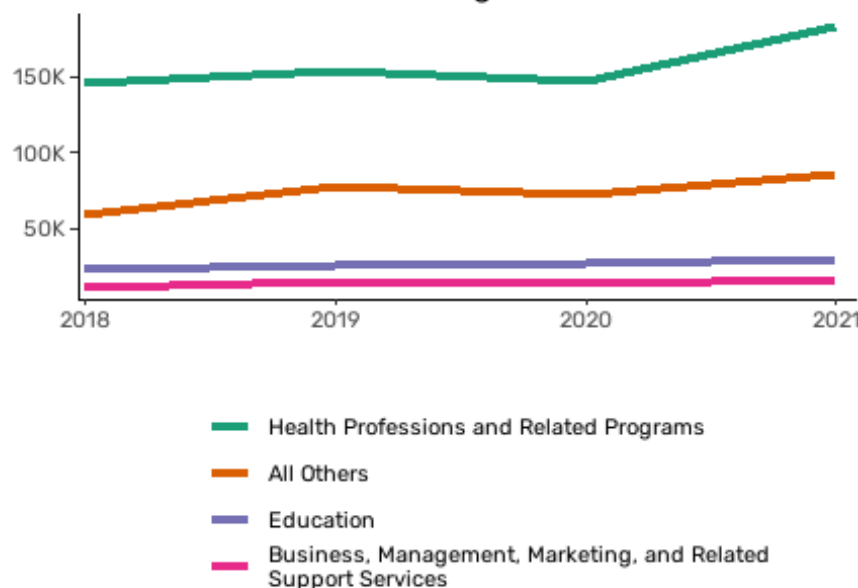
Out-of-State Learning Placements

These learning placements include supervised field experiences such as, but not limited to, clinical rotations, internships, or student teaching.

Students move between states for learning placements, either to seek good placement opportunities out-of-state, or because they are attending an out-of-state institution (either via distance education or in-person) but doing their learning placements back at home.

Out-of-state learning placements have grown by 31% in three years, from 239,955 in 2018 to 315,504 in 2021, and occur most frequently in Health Professions and Related Programs.

Out of State Learning Placements

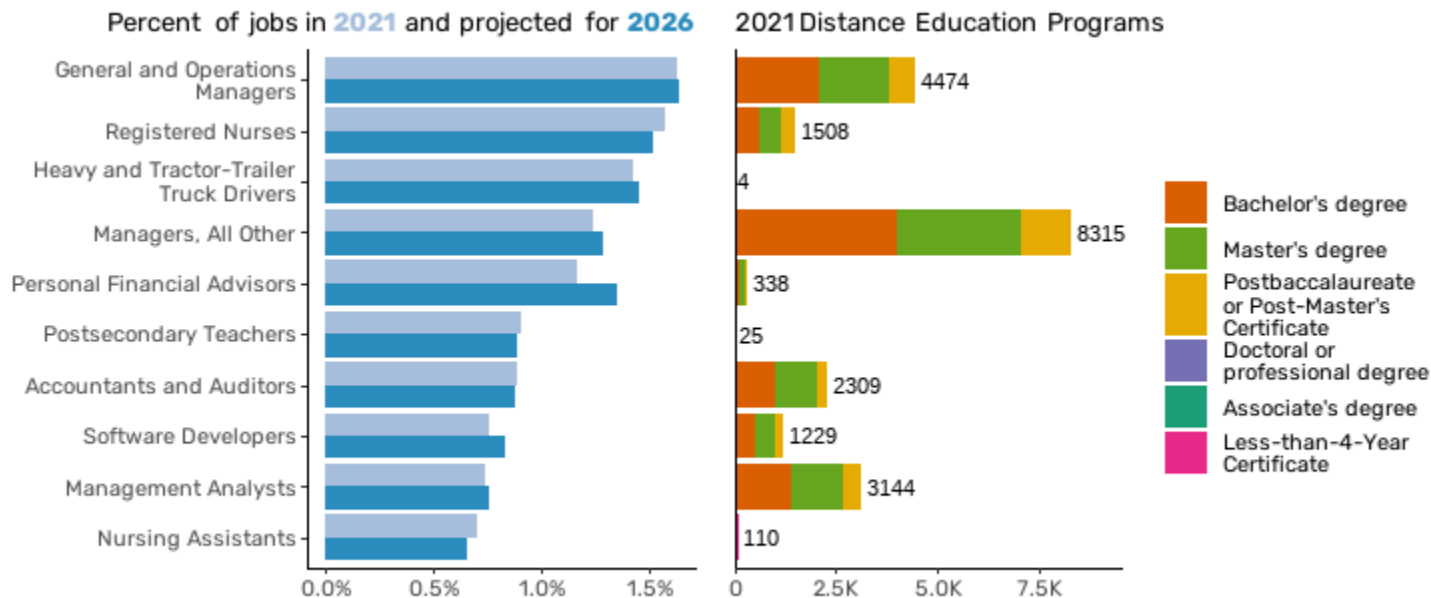


Source: NC-SARA

Workforce Development

What are the top occupations in that require a postsecondary credential or degree?

Top United States Occupations in That Require Some Postsecondary Education



Sources: Lightcast, IPEDS

Many of the largest occupations that require postsecondary education are expected to grow as shares of total employment over time, increasing the need for college-educated workers. Of these ten occupations, U.S. colleges and universities offer distance education programs at the typical entry level of education, or one level higher, in all of them, though some occupations are linked to many more distance education programs than others.

The ten largest occupations requiring a post-secondary credential comprised 11% of total U.S. jobs in 2021. Among these occupations, the largest is General and Operations Managers, and the one expected to grow by the largest percentage from 2021 to 2026 is Personal Financial Advisors.

What skills are in demand?

Among jobs with higher education requirements, the skills in highest demand in the United States are the “common” skills of Communications, Management, and Leadership. Common skills are prevalent across many different industries and include personal attributes, behaviors, competencies, and learned skills.

Among more job-specific specialized skills, those most in-demand, based on job posting language in 2022 that also mentioned a college degree, are Marketing, Auditing, and Accounting.

Data Details:

- Attainment projections include data from the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.
- Enrollment data include institutions that do not participate in Title IV financial aid.
- The five most common distance education programs may include more than five programs if there are ties.
- The out-of-state learning placements data exclude placements from institutions in California, Northern Mariana Islands, Palau, Guam, Federated States of Micronesia, Marshall Islands and American Samoa.
- Industry and Occupation data from U.S. Territories are not included.
- The occupation graph includes the top 10 occupations that typically require a post-secondary credential or degree, based on 2021 data and 2026 projections. The top 10 for both time intervals are included, though there is significant overlap. Occupations are based on 6-digit SOC code and ranked by the number of jobs. All types of workers are counted, including those who are self-employed and those not covered by Unemployment Insurance. The distance education programs connected to these occupations are based on Lightcast’s CIP-SOC crosswalk. Only programs at each occupation’s typical entry level of education plus one level higher are included.

Top 10 In-Demand Specialized Skills in the United States

- Marketing
- Auditing
- Accounting
- Finance
- Nursing
- Computer Science
- Data Analysis
- Project Management
- Agile Methodology
- Process Improvement

Source: Lightcast